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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JEDDAH 000179

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TAGS: [ENRG](#) [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PARM](#) [TNGD](#) [TRGY](#) [KCIP](#)
KNNP, SA
SUBJECT: JEDDAH TO HOST NUCLEAR ENERGY SYMPOSIUM

Classified By: Acting Consul General CB Toney for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Department of Nuclear Engineering at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah is planning to host the "International Symposium on the Peaceful Applications of Nuclear Technology in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries" in November 2008. In a discussion with the Chairman of KAU's Nuclear Engineering Department, he revealed that his program has very few students preparing to work in the field of nuclear energy. He believes it is critical that Saudi Arabia invest in alternative energies in anticipation of depleted fossil fuel resources. Acknowledging that the GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia, currently lack the capacity to develop a nuclear energy program, he shared his personal bias for a Saudi partnership with the U.S. on nuclear energy cooperation. END SUMMARY.

SYMPOSIUM ON NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY IN GCC COUNTRIES

¶2. (C) Pol/Econ Offs met April 1 with Dr. Mohammed S. Aljohani, a professor and Chairman of the Department of Nuclear Engineering at KAU in Jeddah. The University was scheduled to hold the "International Symposium on the Peaceful Applications of Nuclear Technology in the GCC Countries" April 14-16, but the event has been postponed until November 3, 2008.

¶3. (U) The symposium is being planned in response to the resolution of the 16th meeting of the GCC committee of the presidents of universities and higher education institutions in GCC countries. The resolution was to activate the declaration of the closing statement of the GCC leaders in their 27th Summit held in Riyadh, December 2006 that announced the intention to pursue application of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and the establishment of a joint plan in this regard. The GCC leaders commissioned a study to set up a common purpose in the area of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in accordance with international standards and systems. This common nuclear related activity will abide by international treaties and be subject to verification inspections.

¶4. (U) The symposium will cover the following topics:

Strategic Planning for Introducing Nuclear Technology in the GCC Countries
- Education and Manpower Development
- Nuclear Regulations and Legislation

- Nuclear Technology Transfer
- Strategic Planning for Nuclear Research Reactors Program
- Strategic Planning for Nuclear Power Generation Programs

Nuclear Power

- Future of Nuclear Power Worldwide
- Experience of Developing Countries
- Nuclear Desalination
- Future Needs of the GCC Countries
- Nuclear Reactors Safety

Nuclear Research Reactors

- International Experience of Research Reactors
- Utilization of Research Reactors
- Current and Future Needs of the GCC Countries
- Experience of Developing Countries

Radiation Protection Status in the GCC Countries

- General Radiation Protection
- Emergency and Accidents
- Environmental Impact and Monitoring
- Radioactive Waste Management and Disposal
- Radiation Sources Safety

Radioisotopes Applications

- Radioisotopes Applications in Oil Industry
- Radioisotopes Applications in Petrochemicals Industries
- Radioisotopes Applications in Hydrology
- Medical and Human Health Applications of Radioisotopes
- Other Applications

----- DEFICIENCY IN HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING

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15. (C) Dr. Aljohani said that the Department of Nuclear Engineering at KAU has existed since 1977. The department, which falls under the Faculty of Engineering, offers three programs of specialization: Nuclear Engineering, Engineering Medical Physics, and Engineering Radiation Protection. A website for the Nuclear Engineering Department indicates that it employs seventeen faculty members; however, Dr. Aljohani said that there are only thirteen Nuclear Engineering faculty members. He also said that there are currently only two students pursuing a degree in Nuclear Engineering. He recalled that in the past there was higher enrollment, but that in recent years the department did not want to deceive prospective students about post-graduate job opportunities in Saudi Arabia in the field of nuclear engineering, and therefore recruitment and enrollment in the program fell. He said that most current job opportunities in the field of nuclear engineering exist in the medical industry.

16. (C) Dr. Aljohani did not express an awareness of other educational or training programs in the field of nuclear engineering in Saudi Arabia. Also, he did not express an awareness of cooperation between the Department of Nuclear Engineering at King Abdulaziz University and the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST). (COMMENT: There often appears to be a lack of coordination between academic departments of the same field at different institutions in Saudi Arabia. END COMMENT.) Dr. Aljohani did say that his Department has in the past partnered with the private sector, but that research projects have been somewhat limited.

----- PROFESSOR STUDYING ENERGY ECONOMICS

17. (C) Dr. Aljohani is currently working on a study to project when nuclear energy would be needed to replace energy produced using fossil fuels. While he said that some studies show that Saudi oil will be exhausted in seventy or eighty

years, he himself proposed that some models predict oil supplies could be depleted in only thirty years. He believes it is critical that Saudi Arabia invest in alternative energies, both for electricity and for the production of desalinated water.

PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNATIONAL NUCLEAR ENERGY COOPERATION

¶8. (C) Dr. Aljohani acknowledged that the GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia, currently lack the capacity to develop a nuclear energy program. Contemplating a role for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in providing assistance in developing a Saudi nuclear energy program, he said he does not believe that the IAEA is necessarily the right partner for this job. He thinks that a large, and in his opinion, bureaucratic, international organization will not help to develop the best program for Saudi Arabia. He feels that a better solution would be for Saudi to work directly with another country to develop a nuclear energy program.

¶9. (C) French President Sarkozy's proposals to cooperate with Saudi Arabia in the development of a nuclear energy program, made during his visit to Saudi in January 2008, did not impress Dr. Aljohani. The Chairman of KAU's Nuclear Engineering Department, who received his doctorate from Georgia Tech, expressed a bias for partnering with the U.S. on nuclear energy cooperation rather than other countries. He supported his conviction that the U.S. would be the best partner for Saudi Arabia in nuclear energy cooperation by knowledgeably citing statistics about U.S. nuclear engineering capabilities, the contribution of nuclear technologies to U.S. GNP, and the U.S. share in the global market for nuclear technology.

¶10. (C) Dr. Aljohani expressed an interest in having USG officials speak at the November 2008 conference in Jeddah. He said that ideally he would like to invite the head of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to be the keynote speaker, and that there remain a number of topics on the agenda for which speakers have not been identified.

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¶11. (C) COMMENT: Mission believes this will be the first GCC-wide seminar on nuclear energy since the GCC summit statement on the subject. In light of that statement, Bahrain's recent acceptance of a nuclear energy Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S., and the UAE agreement to purchase French reactors, this symposium is likely to have considerably more substance than it would have even six months ago. Mission believes that USG participation in the symposium would be useful. END COMMENT.
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